THE IMPORTANCE
of being
Earnest

By Oscar Wilde
Directed by Victor Pappas
Dear Educators,

Oscar Wilde’s play, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, is a play that takes serious matters and treats them frivolously, and takes frivolous matters and treats them seriously. While this may have seemed like a novel and subversive reversal a hundred years ago, today it almost seems like the norm. People get their news from spoof news shows on Comedy Central, and they spend a serious amount of time pondering the world of fashion and celebrity gossip. Wilde’s play may be more relevant today than it even was when he wrote it!

This play is excellent for students, as it is a hilarious send-up of familiar Victorian stuffiness, and it presents a simple plot with an unlikely ending. But more than that, it is a great starting place for a conversation about what is serious and what is frivolous, and how we treat each of those in our modern world. What is our modern equivalent of the “serious” matters of love and marriage? What is our modern equivalent of the “frivolous” matters of tea and cake, and the sound of the name “Ernest”?

Enjoy our third production of the year, and be sure to check out all of the other main stage productions and upcoming summer camps. During the run of Earnest, we will have our touring productions of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello* performing student matinees for those who cannot get the tours out to their schools, and we have *King Lear* coming up as the final show in our season. This summer, we have six different summer camps offered for ages 8–16, so if you have any budding thespians in your class, send them our way.

Best,
Michelle Burce
*Education Director*

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206-733-8228 ext. 251 or education@seattleshakespeare.org

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Activities in this study guide satisfy Washington State Arts Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs) 1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 3.1, and 3.3
SYNOPSIS

The play opens with Jack Worthing, who assumes the name of "Ernest" in the city, visiting his friend Algernon Moncrieff in his London flat. They both admit to deceiving their relations by inventing fictitious people. Jack has created the "wicked brother" of Ernest who lives in the city and is always getting into trouble, which gives Jack an excuse to escape his routine country life. Algernon has created the sickly friend Bunbury, who provides an excuse for Algernon to decline unwanted social obligations with his family.

Algernon's aunt — the Lady Bracknell — and his cousin Gwendolen Fairfax come visit the two men for tea. Jack proposes to Gwendolen, and she accepts, saying that she has always dreamed of marrying a man named "Ernest." However, Lady Bracknell forbids the engagement, since Jack does not know his parentage and was found in a handbag at Victoria Station when he was a baby. Jack invites Gwendolen to visit him at his country home, and Algernon concocts a plan to go along and masquerade as Jack's wicked brother from the city, Ernest.

At Jack's country estate, his ward Cecily is practicing German with her tutor Miss Prism. Algernon, posing as Ernest, arrives to meet Cecily and is enchanted by her. Cecily also confesses her secret love for him, as she has been captivated by Jack's stories of his brother and has always wanted to marry a man with an upstanding name like "Ernest." They agree to marry, and Algernon secretly plans to re-christen himself "Ernest" before the wedding.

Gwendolyn arrives at Jack's estate and meets Cecily. They discover that they are both engaged to a man named Ernest Worthing, and immediately start fighting. To make matters more complicated, Jack arrives home early from the city, saying that his brother Ernest has died — despite Algernon being there as brother! Jack and Algernon realize that they can no longer hide the truth, and they must confess to Cecily and Gwendolen. The ladies are furious, but Jack and Algernon explain that they only lied about Ernest to spend more time with their beloveds, and swear they will get their names changed to Ernest to satisfy their fiancées. Cecily and Gwendolen forgive them.

Lady Bracknell arrives to bring Gwendolyn home. She sees her nephew Algernon holding hands with Cecily, and asks Jack how big her inheritance is. When she finds out Cecily is extremely wealthy, she consents to Algernon's engagement. However, she still will not consent for Gwendolen to marry Jack, so Jack declares — as Cecily's guardian — that he shall not consent to her marriage until Lady Bracknell consents to his. Lady Bracknell still refuses, and they prepare to depart.

Dr. Chausible arrives, ready to christen the men with new names, and mentions Miss Prism. Lady Bracknell recognizes that name, and asks for her to be brought in. Miss Prism confesses that she was once Lady Bracknell's servant, and was in charge of a baby. She once took the child out for a walk and brought a novel with her, and absentmindedly put the novel in the stroller and the baby in her handbag, leaving the handbag at Victoria station! Jack runs upstairs to fetch the handbag he was found in, and Miss Prism's story is confirmed. The baby she was supposed to take care of was Lady Bracknell's sister's baby, making Jack Algernon's older brother. Lady Bracknell tell him that he is not named Jack, but was named after his father, whose name she cannot remember. The group looks up army records and discovers he was named "Ernest," making Jack's real name Earnest all along!

Lady Bracknell consents to Gwendolyn and Ernest's marriage, Ernest consents to Algernon and Cecily's marriage, and the play ends with Ernest declaring that he now knows, "The importance of being Earnest!"

CHARACTERS

Jack Worthing
A seemingly respectable and responsible young man. He goes by Jack at his country estate in Hertfordshire, but is known as Ernest in London. He was found as a baby in a handbag at Victoria station by an old man who made him guardian to his granddaughter Cecily Cardew. His best friend is Algernon, and he is in love with Gwendolen Fairfax.

Algernon Moncrieff
A young man of London. He is best friends with Jack, whom he knows as Ernest. He is the nephew to Lady Bracknell, and cousin to Gwendolen Fairfax. He falls in love with Cecily Cardew.

Gwendolen Fairfax
Algernon's cousin and Lady Bracknell's daughter. She is in love with Jack Worthing, whom she knows as Ernest.

Cecily Cardew
A young lady who lives in the country. She is ward to Jack Worthing, staying at his estate in Hertfordshire.

Lady Bracknell
A high society lady of London. She is the domineering and snobbish aunt of Algernon, and Gwendolen's mother.

Miss Prism
Cecily's strict governess. She has romantic feelings for Dr. Chausible.

Rev. Canon Chausible
The rector on Jack's estate. He has secret romantic feelings for Miss Prism.

Lane
Algernon's manservant.

Merriman
The butler at Jack's estate.
"By the way, Shropshire is your county, is it not?"

Shropshire is a county in the West Midlands region of England. Agriculture is a major feature of the landscape and economy. There are also small valleys, hills, pine forests, and rivers. It is located about 170 miles northwest of London.

"Yes, but that does not account for the fact that your small Aunt Cecily, who lives at Tunbridge Wells, calls you her dear uncle."

Tunbridge Wells is a large town in west Kent, England, about 40 miles southeast of London. It was originally a tourist resort and spa town.

"If it did, it would prove a serious danger to the upper classes, and probably lead to acts of violence in Grosvenor Square."

A large garden square in the Mayfair district of London, Grosvenor Square is located in a very fashionable residential neighborhood where many of the aristocracy lived.

"Well, I own a house in Belgrave Square, but it is let by the year to Lady Bloxham."

One of the grandest and largest squares in London, Belgrave Square, from its construction until World War II, was occupied by leading members of the British aristocracy. It contains some of the grandest houses in London.

"Jack's address in the country."

A county in England, immediately north of London. It historically was owned by the nobility and aristocracy, as it was land conveniently close to London.

"Where Jack Worthing was found in a handbag."

Victoria station is a London railway terminus located near Victoria Street in central London. The Brighton Line went from Victoria Station to Worthing, which was a fashionable and expensive town.
BIOGRAPHY OF OSCAR WILDE

Oscar Fingal O’Flahertie Willis Wilde was born on October 16, 1854 in Dublin, Ireland. His mother was a nationalist poet, and his father was a prominent ear and eye surgeon. In 1871 he entered Trinity College, Dublin, and went on to study the classics at Magdalen College, Oxford from 1874–1878. He excelled in his studies, and began to gain some success as a poet. More importantly, he met writer and critic Walter Pater, and helped found the Aesthetic Movement, or “Art for art’s sake.”

Wilde moved to London in 1879 and continued to write poetry and advance his reputation as an aesthete. He set off on a tour of America and Canada to deliver lectures on aestheticism, and there met contemporaries Oliver Wendell Holmes, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and Walt Whitman. He returned to Europe in 1883 and lived in Paris. The following year, Wilde married Constance Mary Lloyd. Together they moved to London and had two sons, Cyril and Vyvyan.

While living in London, Oscar Wilde spent his time committed to writing. He published a range of essays and short fiction, and it was at this time he wrote *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, his longest work. He also wrote several plays, including *A Woman of No Importance* (1893), *An Ideal Husband* (1895), and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895).

At the same time he was enjoying literary success, Oscar Wilde began his affair with a young man named Alfred Douglas, son of John Douglas, the Marquess of Queensberry. When the Marquess found out that his son was living with Wilde, he sent a note intended to defame Wilde, addressing it, “For Oscar Wilde posing Soddomite,” a misspelling of sodomite. Although Wilde’s homosexuality was not a well-kept secret, he was outraged by the note and sued the Marquess for libel.

This decision led to a trial wherein the Marquess and his lawyers presented evidence of Wilde’s homosexuality, including passages from his written works, as well as love letters to Alfred Douglas. The case for libel was quickly dismissed, but Wilde himself was arrested on charges of “gross indecency.” He was convicted and sentenced to two years hard labor. During his imprisonment, his wife Constance took their two children and fled to Europe, changing their last name to Holland to shield her sons from Oscar Wilde’s infamy. Wilde was released from prison in 1897 in poor health. He went into exile in France and lived under the pseudonym Sebastian Melmoth. Wilde briefly reunited with Douglas and lived with his long time friend, Robert Ross. Even after Constance’s death, her family prevented Wilde from seeing his sons. His only notable work during his later years was a poem about his experiences in prison *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*. During this period he commented, “I can write, but have lost the joy of writing.”

In 1900, Wilde died, penniless, of cerebral meningitis in the Hotel d’Alscace in Paris. On his deathbed with Ross by his side, he was baptized into the Catholic Church. His friends collaborated to commission a tomb for his remains in the Cimetiere du Pere-Lachaise.

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In 2011, in reaction to the tradition of Wilde fans kissing his tomb with red lipstick, a glass barrier was installed to protect the historic monument. The tradition continues.
“A Trivial Comedy for Serious People”

The subtitle of *The Importance of Being Earnest* is our first clue that this play is making fun of the traditional Victorian morals that were prevalent at this time. This mainly comments on the absurdity of their inability to recognize the difference between that which is important, and that which is unimportant. In the play, those things that are actually trivial are treated with the utmost seriousness. There is a whole passage on how to correctly eat muffins, and much of Cecily’s life is taken up with diary entries about an imaginary romance with Jack’s brother. Similarly, the name “Ernest” is treated with the utmost seriousness in the play, with two characters vowing to only marry someone of that name.

At the same time, very serious matters are treated as trivial details. Both Jack and Algernon declare during the play that a relative or close friend has died, and despite these being fictitious people, their deaths fail to have much impact on those who believed they were real. The “Bunburying” that both Jack and Algernon engaged in is treated as no big deal, despite the fact that today that sort of behavior would be considered fraud or a case of adopting a false identity. Even those things that are quite real and do have an impact on people’s lives are given the same treatment. Losing a baby in a handbag is a much more serious matter than it is made out to be, and marriages are treated as bargaining chips and spur of the moment decisions.

Ultimately, the importance of morals and etiquette to the Victorians is mocked in this play, as Wilde contrasts that which is considered important to his contemporaries with that which is a serious matter and should actually be treated with importance.

Victorian Morality

The Victorian era is notable not just for its historical happenings, but also for the relative importance of morality during that time. Victorian morality is characterized by sexual restraint, low tolerance of crimes, and a strict social code of conduct. In particular, the idea of controlling of nature lies at the heart of this ideology. This includes both the natural world, and our own human nature, including intemperance and sexual impulses. The degree to which the Victorians were uncomfortable with human sexuality is evident. They created euphemisms for body parts — “dark" and “light” meat come from a Victorian aversion to the words “leg” and “breast” — and male and female authors were separated on bookshelves. Museums added fig leaves to classical nude statues.

The private self and the public self were separated. While the public self might stick to routines, regularity, and tradition, the private self might go underground to indulge. There were still people who found ways to engage in “immoral” acts or lives of excess, as Jack does when he goes by Ernest, his immoral brother, in the city. This dichotomy also led people to mask intention. Lovers developed a coded language of flowers to communicate their feelings, since written communication of emotion or sexual feelings was considered immoral. For instance, Cecily offers Algernon a Marechal Niel rose, which carries the meaning, “I’m yours, heart and soul.” To the Victorians, the surface appearance of normality and propriety was important to preserve, and the more private emotions or indulgences were important to keep hidden.

While Victorian morality today seems either absurd or even personally damaging, the earnest ambition to create a moral civilization led to many advancements in social justice that we still benefit from today. The concept of female purity and moral superiority, along with the historically recent exclusion of women form the economy, led to the formation of female activist groups. Victorian moral fervor inspired laws against child labor, raised the age of consent from 10–12 to 16, and established environmental conservationism.

Oscar Wilde mocked this strict code of morality in his writing of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and even in some cases stood the moral code on its head. Our main character Jack is an upstanding gentleman in the country, but leads a double life of immorality and excess when he is in the city, even going by a different name. Algernon comments that it should be his servant who sets an example of morality for the upper class, implying that the aristocracy has more vices than the lower classes. This view of morality was influenced by the aristocracy and monarchy, who were considered the spiritual leaders of the nation. In particular, some of this stemmed from Queen Victoria, who was well aware of how the loose morals of previous monarchs had eroded some of the respect for the crown.
THE VICTORIAN ERA

Oscar Wilde lived during the Victorian era, a period of English history which reflected the time Queen Victoria reigned as the monarch of England. It was a time which dramatically changed the country and saw an incredible amount of growth in all fronts. England became a very self-confident country and enjoyed a long period of peace, prosperity and refined sensibilities.

An important aspect of the Victorian era is that the population had doubled around 1901. A number of factors contributed to this. Environmental and health standards rose during this time. Improvements in nutrition, drinking water and medicine enabled it less likely for people to get sick. As a result, the mortality rate was low; there was no catastrophic epidemic or famine in England in the 19th century. In addition, more people were getting married and having families earlier. Because the country was doing well, the prosperity enabled more people to finance marriages and new households earlier.

Under Victoria’s reign, England saw an explosion within the arts. Writers like Charles Dickens, the Brontë sisters, Arthur Conan Doyle all were read, enjoyed and celebrated. Gilbert and Sullivan saw their comic operas become the most popular musical theater of its time. People went to the theatre, the opera, and the music hall in great numbers. Men and women had their respective clubs. People became interested in science and the natural world; Charles Darwin wrote and published *Origin of the Species*. The Victorian age also marked a great age of the British circus, which became the preeminent form of spectacle in its time.

Technology also flourished during this time, with steam ships, railroads and stagecoaches all contributing to transporting goods and travel. The first postage stamp was created, which changed postage from charging according to distance to a signal flat rate. In the latter part of Victoria’s reign, the cinema, telegraph, telephones, cars and planes were all realized. In the latter part of her time as queen, hand-held cameras were available.
However, with great growth came great poverty. Due to the rapid urbanization and growth spurred on by the Industrial Revolution, the working class struggled to find a living. Child labor became an increasing problem as children were employed in factories, mines and other jobs which were both dangerous and low-paying. Prostitution also became a problem, with many referring to it as the “Great Social Evil.” It also reflected on how Victorian society viewed women, which was as a homemaker and as being chaste. Crime also became a problem, with the most common crimes being theft and murder. The most famous and notorious was “Jack the Ripper”, who targeted women in the infamous White Chapel district of London.

Another great problem was the great famine in Ireland in 1845. The famine, caused by a combination of a bad potato crop, disease, and land disputes, caused over a million deaths and over a million people to emigrate. The famine and the British government’s lack of proper aid created a touchstone which would be a strong motivator in the Irish rebellion and separation from Britain. Britain was also working to tighten its hold in Africa, which led to the Anglo-Zulu War.

The Victorian Age is remarkable in many respects. Within England itself, one saw the picture of a prosperous country. There were explosions all around of culture, science and population. Yet the cost of this prosperity was obvious, with the great amount of poverty, troubles abroad, and the problems England’s efforts to maintain and expand its empire created. There is little doubt that Oscar Wilde, an Irishman himself and therefore an outsider, saw the disparities and conflicts within this remarkable time. This likely contributed to his remarkable career as a writer.
REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Before watching the show, have students reflect on the following questions, either in a large group, small group, or individually in a journal.

Can you think of a time when you lied about something, and it came back to haunt you? Did you ever feel like you needed to “set the record straight”?

What are some social expectations that people today are asked to live up to? For example, are families expected to eat together at the dinner table? Are men and women expected to behave a certain way in public? How do you think social expectations were different during the Victorian era?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Here are some discussion questions to answer as a group after seeing the production. Some possible answers are included, but students may come up with more based on their interpretation of the play.

Jack and Algernon both offer to change their names to Ernest in order for Gwendolen and Cecily to marry them. Is it reasonable for them to do this? What are some other changes people might make to themselves to make them more attractive to a fiancée?

- It is reasonable — people make all sorts of changes to themselves out of love, like changing jobs, moving to a different city or neighborhood, converting to another religion, or altering bad habits.
- It is reasonable, since most women end up changing their names when they get married, and the men lied about their names from the start.
- It is not reasonable — no one should change who they are just to get someone to like them.

In what ways are the play’s values about love and marriage similar to or different from today’s values?

- Jack and Gwendolen have a relationship that is very similar to what we might expect today, with a long courtship and Jack proposing directly to Gwendolen because he is in love with her.
- Marrying for love after knowing someone for a while is similar to today’s values.
- Asking a parent’s permission to marry their child is not a commonly held value today.
- Algernon proposes to Cecily after knowing her less than a day. This is different than what people might do today.
- Lady Bracknell does not approve of the marriages until she knows that people have a good name and a lot of money. Marrying for prestige and wealth are not commonly held values today.

How do the different characters create their own realities? In what ways do they deceive themselves or others about their lives?

- Algernon has created an invalid friend “Bunbury” so that he can get out of social engagements.
- Jack has created a wicked brother in the city named Ernest so that he can have fun and not set a bad example for his ward.
- Cecily has created a full relationship with Jack’s brother Ernest in her diary, pretending they are in love.
- Miss Prism has changed her identity out of shame for losing Lady Bracknell’s sister’s baby.

This play features main characters that are wealthy enough to not have to work. They are occupied by the pursuit of entertainment, and escaping boredom is a major goal. Algernon states, “It is awfully hard work doing nothing.” Is it desirable to be born into enough wealth that you never have to work? Why or why not?

- It is desirable because then you can choose to follow your dreams without worrying about how much money you will make doing that.
- It is desirable because you can share your money with those who make less than you do.
- It is not that desirable, because working gives you a purpose in life, and money can motivate you to do things you might not otherwise.
- It is not that desirable, because rich people often live unsustainable lives of excess.

Here are some follow-up questions you may want to bring into this discussion:

- Why do we find the lives of rich people so fascinating?
- What would you do with a typical day if you did not need to work or do chores?
- Do you think you would ever get bored?
**ACTIVITY: THE IMPORTANCE OF NAMES**

In *The Importance of Being Earnest*, both Gwendolen and Cecily declare they have always wanted to marry a man named Ernest, and cannot imagine marrying anyone else. Names are an important part of our identities, both our given names and our family names. The following activities explore several ways that we value names today.

**Name Game**

Have students stand in a circle. Each student in turn should think of an adjective that describes themselves or a hobby that is very important to them, starting with the same sound as their first name or common nickname: for example, “Triathlon Ted,” or “Xbox Erica.” Then go around the circle and have each student say their name + adjective, and do a movement that goes along with it: for example miming playing a console game or running in place. Have the entire class repeat that name + adjective and the motion, and then move on to the next student.

After you finish the activity, discuss the following questions:

- Do any of your classmates go by a nickname? Why might you choose to do so?
- How much of your identity do you associate with your name?
- How much of your identity do you associate with your personality traits or activities?

**Judging People by Their Names**

Many people are judged by what they are named. This can happen intentionally in fiction, where an author chooses names to reflect the personalities of their characters. This can also happen unintentionally in life, when someone is judged by what their name is. This can happen for many reasons, such as having a culturally distinct name, having a name that someone associates with a bad experience, or having a name that gets confused with someone else’s. One perfect example of this is people hearing the name, “Barack Hussein Obama” and assuming that the President must be a Muslim because of his name.

Have students divide a piece of paper in half. One on side, have students write down names that they have a negative association with for some reason. These may include names like famous people they dislike (Adolph Hitler), fictional villains (Voldemort), names of people they associate bad experiences with (Ms. Smith, my calculus teacher), or names that sound old-fashioned to them (Gretchen). On the other side of the paper, have student write down names that they have a positive association with for some reason. These may include movie stars (Benedict Cumberbatch), personal heroes (Marie Curie), favorite fictional characters (Katniss), or names that sound good to them (Madison).

After students have written down their lists of names, have them share their lists with a partner, seeing where they have overlap and where they are different. Discuss the following questions as a class:

- What types of names did many people list as having negative associations? Why?
- What types of names have a positive association for you?
- Can you think of times when people are judged by their names?
- Can you think of a time when you have been judged, or have judged someone because of what their name was?

**Pseudonyms**

Many authors write and publish their works under assumed names or pseudonyms for a number of reasons, and many entertainers adopt stage names for various reasons. Look up either a writer or an entertainer who used or uses a name that is not their own, and try to figure out why they would use an assumed name. You can provide students with suggestions of people to research, or let them choose their own. Here is a list of possible options:

- Mark Twain
- Lewis Carroll
- George Eliot
- Stephen King
- Ellery Queen
- J. K. Rowling / Robert Galbraith
- Roderick Jaynes
- Nicolas Cage
- LL Cool J

As a class, discuss the various reasons why someone might change their name when they publish a written work, act in a movie, or become an entertainer. Have you ever used a pseudonym or assumed name — in an online setting, an anonymous letter, or other circumstance?
**ACTIVITY: EPIGRAMS**

Oscar Wilde was famous for his epigrams — pithy sayings that express an idea in an amusing and clever way. His plays are full of characters saying witty remarks that express some (often mistaken) universal truth about the world, and are quotable outside the play. Below are a few activities related to his famous quotes. On the following page is a list of epigrams from *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

### Differing Views

Have students choose an epigram from the list, and write out a short explanation of what it means. Then, working in pairs, have students write a short scene (10–20 lines) involving two characters who disagree on the idea behind the epigram. Be sure to include the actual quote at one point in the scene. Take volunteers for students to read their scene aloud.

Here is an example scene, for reference:

JILL: What are you reading?
JACK: A novel, and I’m just finishing it up now.
JILL: Was it good?
JACK: Not at all. It ended happily for everyone in the most unlikely way.
JILL: That sounds like it would be a lot of fun to read! But you didn’t like it?
JACK: I don’t like novels that end happily. They depress me so much.
JILL: Don’t they give you hope that everything will turn out ok?
JACK: No, they make me remember how life actually doesn’t always turn out ok! We just use fiction to try and escape from the sadness and torment of our real lives. So when a book ends happily, I think of all the ways it would have actually happened in real life, and I get sad.
JILL: Wow. That does sound depressing.

As a class, discuss the following questions:

- Did any students have different takes on the same epigram?
- Which perspective do you agree with?

### Marketing with Wilde

Have students imagine that they have been hired by a marketing firm that specializes in marketing products using quotes from Oscar Wilde. Have students choose one of the epigrams from *The Importance of Being Earnest* and think of a product that they might be able to market using that phrase. They are allowed to choose anything that could be marketed except an actual Oscar Wilde book or play. They are also allowed to add a few more words, as long as the epigram stays intact.

Have students create a poster, using magazine cutouts, clipart printouts, or hand-drawings to advertise their product. Be sure that the name of the product and the epigram are both included on the poster.

Here are a couple examples:

- An ad for natural-looking makeup, with the tagline, “To be natural is such a very difficult pose to keep up”... but it doesn’t have to be with this product.
- An ad for a line of cell phone cases, with the tagline, “I never change, except in my affections”... and today I like purple passion, while tomorrow I may prefer the sleek black case!

Look at each other’s poster advertisements, and then discuss the following questions:

- Did several students use the same quote to mean very different things, or to promote different products?
- Were there especially popular quotes? Why do you think that is?
- Why do advertisers use quotable lines to promote their products?
“The truth is rarely pure and never simple.”

“I never travel without my diary. One should always have something sensational to read in the train.”

“All women become like their mothers. That is their tragedy. No man does, and that is his.”

“The good ended happily, and the bad unhappily. That is what Fiction means.”

“I hope you have not been leading a double life, pretending to be wicked and being good all the time. That would be hypocrisy.”

“In matters of grave importance, style, not sincerity, is the vital thing.”

“If I am occasionally a little over-dressed, I make up for it by being always immensely over-educated.”

“I never change, except in my affections.”

“I hate people who are not serious about meals. It is so shallow of them.”

“Never speak disrespectfully of Society, Algernon. Only people who can’t get into it do that.”

“I could deny it if I liked. I could deny anything if I liked.”

“I don’t like novels that end happily. They depress me so much.”

“Long engagements give people the opportunity of finding out each other’s character before marriage, which is never advisable.”

“Oh! I don’t think I would like to catch a sensible man. I shouldn’t know what to talk to him about.”

“My dear fellow, the truth isn’t quite the sort of thing one tells to a nice, sweet, refined girl. What extraordinary ideas you have about the way to behave to a woman!”

“To be natural is such a very difficult pose to keep up.”

“Indeed, no woman should ever be quite accurate about her age. It looks so calculating.”

“Oh! it is absurd to have a hard-and-fast rule about what one should read and what one shouldn’t. More than half of modern culture depends on what one shouldn’t read.”

“When one is in town one amuses oneself. When one is in the country one amuses other people. It is excessively boring.”
Mission Statement:
With the plays of William Shakespeare at our core, Seattle Shakespeare Company engages our audiences, our artists and our community in the universal human experience inherent in classic drama through the vitality, immediacy and intimacy of live performance and dynamic outreach programs.

About Us
Seattle Shakespeare Company is the Puget Sound region’s year-round, professional, classical theatre. The company’s growing success stems from a deep belief in the power and vibrancy of the time-tested words and ideas of Shakespeare and other classical playwrights along with a commitment to artistic excellence on stage. The results have been provocative performances that both challenge and delight audiences while fostering an appreciation for great stage works.

Our combined programs — which include indoor performances, free outdoor productions, regional tours, educator and youth programs — reach across barriers of income, geography, and education to bring classical theatre to Washington State.

EDUCATION PROGRAMS

In-School Residencies, Matinees, and Workshops:
• In-School Residencies bring active, customized curriculum into schools across Washington State. Professional teaching artists plan with teachers to tailor each residency to fit the needs and objectives of the classroom. Seattle Shakespeare Company residencies inject vibrant, active exercises into lessons that unlock the text, themes, and actions of a Shakespeare play.
• Student Matinees bring over 3,000 students annually to our mainstage productions in the Seattle Center. Teachers are provided free study guides, and student groups are invited to stay after the show for a free Q&A session with the cast.
• Pre-show and post-show workshops can be booked to accompany mainstage matinees. These workshops include an introduction to the play itself, student activites, and insights into direction and design choices of our specific production.

Touring Productions:
• Fresh and accessible 90-minute productions tour across Washington State each Spring, reaching more than 14,000 students and adults. These nimble productions perform as easily in school gymnasiums as professional theatre facilities. Teachers are provided free study guides and students enjoy free post-show Q&A sessions with the cast.
• Schools have the opportunity to book accompanying in-school residencies with touring productions, led by members of the touring cast and additional teaching artists.

Camps and Classes:
• Our summer “Camp Bill” series in Seattle and Edmonds offers young actors a variety of camps to choose from or combine. Camps range from a One-Week Introduction to a Three-Week Production Intensive, with many options in between.
• In our Fall and Spring after-school “Short Shakes” programs, young actors develop their skills and gain hands-on performance and production experience.
• Seattle Shakespeare Company occasionally offers adult classes and workshops to our community featuring guest artists who work on our stage.

EDUCATION STAFF CONTACTS

In-School Residencies and Camps
Michelle Burce, Education Director
206-733-8228 ext. 251
michelleb@seattleshakespeare.org

Touring Productions
Casey Brown, Education Associate
206-733-8228 ext. 241
caseyb@seattleshakespeare.org

Student Matinees
Lorri McGinnis, Box Office Manager
206-733-8228 ext. 220
lorrim@seattleshakespeare.org

General
Ticket office: 206-733-8222
Administrative offices: 206-733-8228
Fax: 206-733-8202
Seattle Shakespeare Company
PO Box 19595
Seattle, WA 98109
www.seattleshakespeare.org